PLOWBOY TO SENATOR

HON. SHELBY M. CULLOM TALKS OF HIS PRIVATE AND PUBLIC LIFE.

Small Beginnings of a Career That Has Proved Useful and Honorable —Stories of Abraham Lincoln.

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 1.—I had a long chat the other night with Shelby M. Cullom, the famous United States Senator from Illinois. He is one of the most interesting talkers among our public men. Plain and simple in his ways, there are no frills nor furbelows about either himself or his conversation. He calls a spade a spade, and as a story teller has many of the attributes which were so noted in Abraham Lincoln. He grew up under the shadow of Lincoln, and his likeness to the martyred President has been often remarked. No one would call Cullom handsome. His frame is big, bony and angular. His figure is straight, with shoulders so square that the arms seem to fall from them at right angles, the whole acting as a clothes frame for his Prince Albert coat. His gestures are not graceful, and his face in repose is severe. When he talks, however, a smile creeps out of the corners of his eyes, the lines of his features soften, and you forget everything else in the impression of honest strength and good fellowship which shows out of them. You soon discover that Cullom has lots of personal magnetism, and that, with it all, he is full of brains, and at the same time possessed of a remarkable degree of plain, practical common sense. There are few men in the United States who stand so close to the people and who appreciate their wants so well. There are few who have had as remarkable a career and have not been spoiled by it; and few Senators whose lives would be more inspiring examples to the boys of the United States.

During my visit with Senator Cullom I drew him on to talk about his boyhood. He told me that his family was Scotch-Irish, and that his ancestors came from Maryland to Kentucky. It was there that Cullom was born, and when he was a baby of nine months, chewing his little fists, which were not so angular then, with his toothless gums, and squalling at times, I venture, in more piercing tones than those he now uses in the United States Senate, the family removed to Illinois. They rode out and in through the stumps in canvas-covered wagons, and baby Cullom, wrapped in a feather bed, was rocked by the jolting of the wheels. Father Cullom settled within about fifteen miles of Peoria, taking up five hundred acres, and chopping a farm out of the forests. Baby Cullom crept over the log floor and toddled about the clearings year by year, until he became old enough to go to school. His first lessons were studied in a log schoolhouse, and working on the farm and studying at school made up his boyhood life.

After he had finished his schooling at the country schools young Cullom concluded that he wanted a better education. His father was hardly able to send him to college, and Shelby had to look out for himself. How he succeeded I will tell in his own words. Said he:

"I was about seventeen years old at this time. I thought I ought to be better educated, and I looked about to see how I could make some money to pay my way through the academies. I saw an opening in a country school near where I lived. I applied for it and got it. My wages at the start were $18 a month, and I must have done pretty well, for at the end of the second month they raised me to $20, and I received this for the remainder of the year. I boarded with the scholars, and saved nearly every cent of my munificent salary."

A PLOWBOY SENATOR.

"A whole year's salary wouldn't amount to much, Senator, at $20 a month," said I. "Was this the only way you had to make money?"

"No; I made something after school was over by plowing. I got $1.25 an acre for it. I borrowed five yokes of oxen of my father, and went to breaking up land for the neighbors. We plowed a furrow about eighteen inches wide and hitched from four to five yokes of oxen to the plow. We fastened the plow to wheels and set it for the proper depth. I walked outside and yelled at the team. It is no easy matter to drive oxen, I can tell you, and a great deal of the lung power which I have to-day was, I venture, developed then."

"By the way," the Senator continued, with a twinkle in his eye, "a rather queer thing happened in connection with that plowing. You know they talked a little of me for President four years ago, and some of my old friends in Illinois thought I had a chance for the White House. One of these was a farmer for whom I had broken land in my boyhood. He wrote to me, recalling the circumstance. He said he had a print of my bare foot, which I had made at that time, in a clayey strip on his land. He said he had cut it out and kept it, and that he was going to frame it as the foot of a President."

"He must have been one of the grandfathers of Du Maurier's Billie, and history is only repeating itself in the craze over the foot of 'Trilby,'" said I, as I looked at the good, comfortable understanding of Mr. Cullom. "And did you plow in your bare feet, Senator?"

"Yes; I suppose so," replied Mr. Cullom. "We did a great deal of farm work in our bare feet in early days. It was more comfortable than working with shoes, though now and then one was liable to raise a stone bruise or snag off a toe nail against a root."

"Where did you go to school, Senator," I asked.

"It was at a seminary at Mount Morris, in northern Illinois," replied Senator Cullom. "There was a big Methodist institution there at that time, and it was considered a very good school. I studied Latin and Greek and other things, but before I got through I fell sick. This was within three months of the close of my term. I thought I was going to die, and I wanted to go home. They persuaded me to stay, however, and give the valedictory."

"Then, I suppose, you were at the head of your class, Senator?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Cullom. "I managed to keep pretty close to the top."

"What did you do next?"

"I came home," was the reply. "No one thought I would live. I was as lean as a rail and pale as a sheet of white paper. I had an ambition to be a lawyer when I started to the seminary, but my sickness led me to give this up and go back to the farm. Ten days after I got home I was in the harvest field. I soon grew better, and by fall I had rented a quarter section of land from my father, and was putting it in crops. As winter came on, I grew restless. I told my father he could have his land again, and that I was going to Springfield to study law."

LINCOLN'S BOY FRIEND.

"You studied there with Abraham Lincoln, did you not?"

"No," replied Senator Cullom, "I did not study in the office of Mr. Lincoln. A great deal of his work was on the circuit, and he spent but little time in his office. I had known him since I was a boy of eleven, and he was already my ideal hero. When I went to Springfield I asked him if I had not better study law with him, but he advised me to go into the office of a lawyer who would be stationary. He gave me lots of good points, however, and I was closely associated with him from that time on."

"How did you like the law?" I asked.

"I liked it very well," replied the Senator, "and I would not object to practicing now. I did not get to be a lawyer without considerable trouble. A few months after I took up the study I began to get sick again. I had an attack of typhoid fever, and hung for some time between life and death. The doctors told me that the only thing that could save me was to buy a pony and ride in the open air. I then went back home and tried the pony cure. But it was no good. I had no object in my rides, and I could not gain strength.

"This was the situation when I went to Peoria one day. It was then, as it is now, quite a hog market. I met one of the capitalists, and he asked me if I would like to buy hogs for them. He offered to pay me ten cents a hog, the farmers to keep the hogs until they were wanted, and to be paid the market price prevailing at the time of delivery. I accepted the proposition and started out to buy. During the next few months I bought thousands of hogs. I galloped from one farm to another, buying all the swine within sight, and I contracted for all the hogs in two or three counties. At the close of my season I found that I had cleared $500, and also that I had entirely regained my health. I took the money and went back to Springfield. I resumed my studies and was soon admitted to the bar."

"How did you get into politics, Senator?"

"Every lawyer in those days was, to a certain extent, a politician," replied Senator Cullom. "The law is, as a rule, one of the stepping stones to politics. I got into politics because I tried to use politics as a stepping stone to the law. I was practicing in Springfield, you know, and I thought if I became a member of the Legislature that this would give me acquaintances all over the State, and would help my law business. The result was that I became a candidate and was elected. I was re-elected, then made Speaker of the House, and after that sent to Congress. Later on I was elected Governor for six years, and then sent to the United States Senate. There you have it all in a nutshell."

LINCOLN AS A STORY TELLER.

"How about Lincoln, Senator? Was he really such a great story teller as is claimed?"

"Yes," was the reply. "But he did not tell stories for the sake of telling stories. His stories came out in the shape of illustrations of his thought, or to enforce his arguments. He liked to talk, and during his life at Springfield there was a drug store, which still stands there, to which Lincoln used to come nearly every night to talk. There was a crowd who came there to listen to him, and many an argument was sprung merely for the sake of getting Lincoln to talking. He would brighten up as he began to talk, and I used to sometimes think that he told stories to get away from his thoughts and himself. When he was alone he would often drop into habits of deep meditation, would seem to be gloomy, and it was almost impossible at such times to arouse him."

"I have heard that he was moody and blue, and that he hovered at times on the verge of insanity. Is that so?"

"He may have been moody at times," replied Senator Cullom, "but his head was extraordinarily clear. I used to think, when I saw him sitting and apparently brooding over something that he was possibly turning over the great questions concerning the matters which he had to settle in after life, and that the responsibilities which he was to have were already before him. He was, you know, a philosopher, and his great mind and soul were different from those of common men."

"Was Abraham Lincoln a religious man?" I asked.

"In one sense he was, and in another, not," replied Senator Cullom. "As to a belief in a future state and a God, I think he was. He had a religious side to his nature, and I have seen evidences that he had made a deep study of the Bible. As to being a doctrinal Christian—a believer in certain creeds and churches—he was not. As to his study of such matters, I remember an incident. The Universalist and Campbellite preachers of Springfield were holding a joint debate upon certain doctrines. Well, one night, when they were discussing whether there was a hell, Abraham Lincoln attended. He and I sat together, and when the two preachers had finished their discussion, we walked out. I remember Lincoln was disgusted with the discussion. He swung himself out of his seat as they stated the debate was closed, and said to me: 'They have scarcely touched the question.' He had evidently been thinking upon the subject and had it all figured out in his mind."

"I have a book, Senator, entitled, 'Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist,' and trying to prove that he was so."

"I do not think that he was," replied Senator Cullom.

"What were the elements of his strength?"

"Abraham Lincoln," replied Senator Cullom, "had a great sympathy with the people. He was a man of the people. He could feel for them and with them. He had great common sense and great executive ability."

LINCOLN AS A POLITICIAN.

"Was he a shrewd politician?"

"Yes; he was a good judge of men and knew how to move them."

"Was he ambitious?"

"Yes; very much so," was the reply. "But he was so wrapped up in the great questions with which he had to deal that it is hard to tell where his ambitions ended and his convictions began. He was far-seeing. I remember the campaign with Douglas. I was in it with Lincoln, and when the returns came in, though Lincoln had the popular vote, a Legislature had been chosen which would elect Douglas. I met Lincoln coming home just after the news had been received. I said, 'Well, Mr. Lincoln, we are beaten.'

"'Yes,' he replied, 'we are beaten.'

"'I am very sorry,' said I, and at this old Abe put his hand on my shoulder, and, looking down at me with a smile, replied:

"'Oh, my boy, don't worry; it will all come right in the end.'

"I remembered his confident tone afterward, and I believe he saw even then that his defeat would make him President of the United States.

"I got my first desire to go to Washington to Congress through Lincoln," Mr. Cullom went on. "It was the night before I left Springfield to go to his inauguration. I was at this time Speaker of the Illinois House, and as I entered his parlor I said:

"'Mr. President, I want to come to Washington, if possible, before you leave.'

"Lincoln's eyes laughed as I used the words 'Mr. President,' and he replied, emphasizing his form of address: 'Mr. Speaker, I hope you will.'

"I then began to scheme to get to Washington and was soon elected a member of Congress."

At this point the conversation turned to politics, and during it I asked Senator Cullom to give me a short statement as to the issues of the next campaign.

Senator Cullom replied: "The issues are not many, but they are very important. The Republican party will espouse protection, sound money and true Americanism, advocating a strong foreign policy on the basis of America as against the world."

"Can the Republican party succeed on such a platform?"

"Yes," replied Senator Cullom; "I think there is no doubt of it."

TALKS OF THE PRESIDENCY.

"Senator Cullom," said I, "how would you like to be President of the United States?"

The Senator thought a moment and replied:

"I would like it very much. I don't believe it would be a very hard office to fill. The President should choose good men to help him. If he selects his Cabinet and subordinates properly these will bring the authorities, the situation and the information that he needs properly before him, and good common sense is enough to determine the rest."

"What qualities should a President have?"

"He should be a man of the people. He should be a patriotic American, should be possessed of common sense, and be a man who knows how to select men and handle men."

"I hear your name mentioned in many quarters for the position," said I, "as a candidate for the Republican party."

"Yes," replied Senator Cullom, "I have been talked of in times past, and I believe there is some talk about me now. To tell the truth, I am tired of the talk, and I have illustrated my situation by comparing it with that of a boy who went to school with me at Mount Morris. This boy I will call Sam. He is a prominent man now, and I dare not mention his name. Well, Sam could not for the life of him learn Latin, and he was kept in the same Latin book from one term to another. At last his teacher, in despair, said to him:

"'Sammy, why don't you study and get out of this? Aren't you ashamed to remain right here in the same place week after week?'

"Sam talked through his nose. His conversation was a continuous whine, and in reply he whined out: 'Yes, I am, and I would study if I had a new book, but I am tired of this. It's the same old thing over and over again, and if it's not to go any further, I want to stop it.'

"And that," continued the Senator, with a laugh, "is my position as to the talk about me for the presidency."

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

HUMOR OF THE DAY.

In London.

Puck.

"And what ever became of Lord Alfred?"

"He went to New York and married into the—a—Stock Exchange.

Pretty Near It.

New York Weekly.

Insurance Examiner—Has there been any insanity in your family?

Mrs. De Avnoo—Well, my sister married a man who hadn't a cent.

Phenomenal Self-Control.

Life.

"That whisky is fifteen years old. I know it, because I've had it that long myself."

The Colonel—By jove, sir, you must be a man of phenomenal self-control.

Facile Decensus Averno.

Detroit Tribune.

"Somebody is raising the devil," exclaimed Lucifer, excitedly.

"I see him," rejoined his satanic majesty, with dignity.

The sinner in the chafing dish wondered what the bet might be, and all was still.

A Misunderstanding.

New York Weekly.

Sultor—Beg pardon for interrupting, but I—er—have just come—er—that is, I have just been speaking to your daughter, and she referred me to you.

Old Gentleman—Gee crickets! I wonder if that girl thinks I am made of money. You are about the fortieth bill collector she has sent in to-day. If she doesn't marry pretty soon, I'll be bankrupt.

The Essential Point.

Puck.

Uncle Backwoods—I don't see but what you have one chance in three of guessin' the card in that three-card monte game.

Nephew—That's right; but you haven't any chance at all of getting the money.

Regardless of Expense.

Spare Moments.

Painting Instructor—Ze young lady puts ze paints on too thick.

Mrs. Newrich—Oh, never mind that, Professor. Her father's got money enough to buy barrels of it if she wants it.

Astonished at Ignorance.

Puck.

American Maiden—Why is it that Englishmen say "don't you know" so much in their conversation?

Visiting Englishman—It must be because they wonder why you don't, don't you know.

Setting Him Right.

Boston Transcript.

Carrie—Oh, yes, you can flatter me to my face; but I heard that you said that I couldn't hold a candle to Mamie Styles.

Harry—I think I must have said you wouldn't, for you know she never did light up well.

One for Each.

Puck.

Mrs. Hoolihan—Wan divorce wud be no good; I want two av thim.

Marks, the Lawyer—What are you driving at?

Mrs. Hoolihan—Thot sly divil do be leadin' a dooble life.

Fin de Siecle.

Rockland Tribune.

The outraged parent clapped his hand upon his sword.

"Draw and defend yourself!" he hissed.

But the profligated son preferred to wait until the old man had got back to the city. Then he made it a sight draft, with the expense of collection added.

Dramatic Note.

Texas Siftings.

Mrs. A.—So your daughter is studying for the stage?

Mrs. B.—Yes, and she is progressing very rapidly.

Mrs. A.—How far has she got?

Mrs. B.—She has already had her photograph taken as Lady Macbeth.

There Were Others.

Washington Star.

"Look," she almost shrieked in her rage as she shook the paper under his face. "Oh, villain, villain, I have found you out in all your base perfidy."

"I—I beg your pardon," said the young man, "but I am afraid I don't quite follow you."

"This is your letter to me."

"Yes."

"It breathes the tenderest affection, doesn't it?"

"I flatter myself," he answered, with a complacent bow, "that it does."

"It is ardent in its protestations of undying devotion, isn't it?"

"If it was as I intended it there's no doubt about its being so."

"Look—look here," she hissed, "and then turn your face in shame. Here are the unmistakable traces of carbon paper. This letter was manifolded."

Another.

Detroit Tribune.

"Egbert," she faltered, "do you think you could ever learn to love another?"

"No," he answered with fierce intensity. "I swear it."

Years passed, and he was true to his word. He learned to tolerate, but not to love his wife's mother.